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World Chronicle

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GUEST: **Rosario GREEN**
Senior Adviser to the UN Secretary-General on Special Political and Gender Issues

JOURNALISTS: Bhaskar Menon, *International Documents Review*
Barbara Crossette, *The New York Times*

MODERATOR: Michael Littlejohns

WOMEN'S ISSUES

Rosario GREEN, Senior Adviser to the United Nations Secretary-General on Special Political and Gender Issues, reviews progress in the advancement of women. She believes that Governments should establish the necessary machinery to implement the recommendations adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. She also believes that some women are needed in decision-making positions before other women can be empowered. In the United Nations system, efforts are under way to improve the status of women and promote true gender balance. Ms. Green hopes that the current financial crisis will not hinder her work to advance women.

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ANNOUNCER: From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues. Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

LITTLEJOHNS: I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**.

Over the last few decades, important progress has been made toward achieving equality between men and women. Yet discrimination against women in education, employment and ownership is still widespread in many parts of the world. Violence against women remains a global phenomenon, and women are an overwhelming majority of the 1 billion people living in abject poverty.

Our guest today is concerned with the advancement of women in the United States system. She is Rosario Green, Senior Adviser to the United States Secretary-General on Special Political and Gender Issues. Joining me to talk with Ms. Green are Bhaskar Menon of the International Documents Review and Barbara Crossette of *The New York Times*.

Ms. Green, welcome to **World Chronicle**. Welcome again, in fact. You were on the programme some months ago.

GREEN: I was that lucky.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ambassador, you are, I guess, the representative in the UN system of the oppressed majority, because in fact there are a few more women in the world than men. Do you feel that the battle for this oppressed majority is being won, or is it a very slow uphill process that's going to take a very, very long time to be achieved?

GREEN: Well, I think that some progress has been achieved, but indeed, we are a long way from really achieving the goal of equality – at the level of countries, of course, but also at the level of the Organization.

LITTLEJOHNS: And what precisely do you do as an adviser to the Secretary-General on gender issues? I presume it's mainly to increase awareness of the problems of discrimination against women.

GREEN: The global idea would be probably to do not only the follow-up of the Beijing Conference at the level of the system –

LITTLEJOHNS: That's the Conference on Women, the international [Fourth World] Conference on Women.

GREEN: That's correct, that's correct. But also to help the Secretary-General to achieve the goal inside the UN proper, as we call the United Nations Secretariat, the funds and programmes over which the Secretary-General has a very direct mandate, and also at the level, I hope, of the agencies. The level of the agencies is going to be decided at the end of April, but I'm counting on the possibility of the creation of an inter-agency committee,

which I will be chairing, in order to make sure that we really work within the house, within the system, to bring equality.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ambassador Green, I'm sure we all recognize that this is a huge cultural problem world-wide. You come from a country, Mexico, where I guess the macho tradition is very strong. I come from England, where there are segregated schools and clubs and so forth; and in fact there seems to be considerable unawareness of problems of sexism in England, from my experience. Do you think that these cultural difficulties are ever going to be overcome?

GREEN: Well, as a result of the conference in Beijing on women, most countries present there committed themselves to put together machinery, programmes, plans in order to really achieve equality. And they, of course, rely upon the different bodies of this Organization, in particular the Commission on the Status of Women, to monitor that the progress is really achieved. You mentioned Mexico, and let me tell you that very recently Mexico – on the day of the International Women's Day, Mexico put together a plan, a programme of action, in order to be consistent with the Declaration of Beijing. The machinery is there. Unfortunately, in countries such as Mexico where the economic and financial crisis are going through a very severe phase, we won't see probably too much money devoted to this endeavour at the beginning. But I'm counting on the women's movement as well as on the NGOs, who are very, very active, in order to claim, and claim over and over again, in front of the Mexican Government and the Governments in general, to really deliver what they committed themselves to in Beijing.

MENON: You know, they're saying that the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world. As a woman who has been in some of the most senior positions in diplomacy in your own country and in the United Nations, to what extent do you think we can hold out any hope that the range of values that we associate with women will at some point begin to have an impact on politics?

GREEN: Well, I think that some of this is happening already, where you find, for instance, women prime ministers or women presidents. And it is a fact that to empower women we really need women in positions of power already. So in those countries you realize that, little by little, some progress has been achieved in terms of women. I do believe in what you say – the difference between male and female is clear. It's not only a physical difference, it's not only an anatomical difference.

LITTLEJOHNS: *Vive la différence*, as they say.

GREEN: *Vive la différence, bien sûr*. It's not only an anatomical difference, but it is a difference in ways of doing things, ways of getting involved. I'm not disqualifying at all the way men get involved in politics or get involved in community life. But I'm saying here that

we women have a way of doing things which is different, and if we don't take into consideration both ways of doing things we will be missing a very important contribution – which is the female contribution – to politics, to economy, to development. If you don't introduce women into development in an integral way, then you will have only half a development.

MENON: But what my question was, do you see this happening? Do you see – in your own experience, to what extent have you been able to have any kind of impact as the person you are rather than as a Mexican diplomat?

GREEN: Right. Well, by setting forward some examples, modest examples, within the Organization. For instance, I'm very happy to tell you that my office is an all-female office, and that we're a very efficient office. And that – I'm sorry to tell you, but the Secretary-General has implied on several occasions that the work that he gives us to deliver is always delivered in a good way. And not only – I wouldn't like to talk only about or to speak only about my role here because it wouldn't be fair, but I realize that wherever there are women directors they bring more women into the Organization. They're pushing women into new positions or into new contracts. And it's not only the same – it's not only happening here in the Secretariat, but it is also happening in some of the programmes and funds. It's happening in UNICEF, very much so; it's happening in UNIFEM, very much so as well. So what I'm trying to tell you is that I've been here only for a couple of years. I hope that after a while I will feel that I have made a difference. But I'm striving, I'm trying, and I'm talking to my colleagues, my male colleagues, and I'm trying to make them more and more gender sensitive.

CROSSETTE: A lot of women are of sort of two minds about your appointment for this reason: They think it's wonderful that someone from such a high rank has been given this sort of brief of looking after women world-wide, in the system and in the building. But they're also a little worried that you have such an important position as a major political adviser to the Secretary-General, and that this is the only woman, you are the only woman, and doing such a good job at that, but this, in a way, would cut into your primary function. And I wonder if this has ever gone through your mind, or how you feel about having to take on such different jobs. Maybe there's some way that they actually go together.

GREEN: Well, it really goes through my mind a lot, because I feel at the end of the day that I'm exhausted, that I don't have enough resources to do what I'm doing. But at the same time I do believe in mainstreaming, and mainstreaming means that I shouldn't be devoted only to the women's file, although it's consuming more and more of my time, but should also be involved in other issues, such as political issues – which is one of the things that we consider most important in mainstreaming, because basically we're there already,

considering social and economic development programmes. But as far as it goes to peace-keeping, peace-building and women in conflict, and so on and so forth, and decision-making, of course, we're not that much into it.

So if I were to forget about my political files, I think that the women's cause would be suffering in a way. Because actually, yes, I'm the woman that has been assigned to the highest position within the Secretariat and has been given some political files. If I were to renounce the political files, we wouldn't be achieving mainstreaming. And I want to bring to the mainstream my experience as a political adviser as well. I'm counting on the possibility of convincing not only the Secretary-General, who is a convinced person about women's endeavours and women's achievements, but also the administration to give me a little bit more support, although we are facing this awful financial crisis, to give me a little bit more support in order not to have to choose between one or the other file. I consider both files as important as ever.

CROSSETTE: When you travel, is there some way to sometimes sort of combine the two sides of your brain on this? That, as you travel, for example, with the Secretary-General in areas of the world where women's issues may be important, you can deal with both the politics and the – or maybe they're all the same issue.

GREEN: Oh yes, that's a beautiful experience. We just travelled to Brazil and Mexico. We were able to see both issues. The Secretary-General was also very interested in seeing any progress in terms of women, and he was very much involved in the talks with Mrs. Cardoso, who is a fantastic fighter – the wife of the President of Brazil, who is a fantastic fighter for women's rights, and also this goes for President Zedillo, this launching of his programme for women. So, on the one hand, I was able to do my women's fight and, on the other hand, everything was very politically oriented. So seeing me there among all these men, and doing not only the female aspects of my job – the women's fight – but also being there in the negotiations – not negotiations, but in the political discussions – and being always there, I guess, I would like to say it was inspiring, at least it was inspiring for me. It showed me that I can combine both of them, in particular when I'm under the shield of the Secretary-General, which was the case on these wonderful trips.

MENON: Now, one of the documents before the Commission on the Status of Women deals with the performance of treaty bodies, of human rights treaty bodies dealing with the status of women. The report is supposed to tell us whether these treaty bodies have in fact been successful, but the report doesn't say that. It deals entirely with procedural matters. Can you tell us why – first of all, why the report is so insubstantive, and if in fact the treaty bodies have been successful?

GREEN: I think that the treaty bodies have been successful. I think that sometimes the treaty bodies don't have too much to report on, because, you know, there are always progress reports. There's nothing like a final report on these issues. Therefore you may consider that they are insubstantial, but actually they are not, because they keep the momentum, they're part of a continuum. Without them, we wouldn't know in which direction we are going. So I say they're trying to do their best, and again, probably – I wouldn't say probably, but I guess it is the lack of resources, enough resources, but it is really putting us in a difficult position to deliver probably more committed reports in the sense of more actions to be taken when we don't know if we're going to have the resources to keep some of the programmes going.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ambassador Green, you mentioned the attitudes of the wife of the President of Brazil and the wife of the President of Mexico in support of women's rights. But the women in elected office in positions of power sometimes seem not to be particularly supportive or even sympathetic to the women's cause, if one may call it that. I'm reminded of Margaret Thatcher, for example, when she was Prime Minister, for a very long time, of the United Kingdom. She seemed to be rather derisive of the feminist movement and took the position that she had climbed to the top by her own efforts and other women should do the same, and they should not be given any special privileges or advantages. Do you think that women should have some kind of affirmative action programme in their favour?

GREEN: Indeed. Indeed. I think that those times in which Mrs. Thatcher was saying what you are remembering are gone, definitely. I don't believe that nowadays women in those positions are saying the same things, "If I did it my way, and it was difficult for me, why do we have to facilitate the way for other women?" I think that the mood has changed, because we are becoming more and more sensitized about the fact that unless we make a programme, a special programme, unless we take affirmative action, unless we really have preferential treatment for a while, we won't ever be able to close the gap. I mean, this is a gap that has gone on for so many years. In order to close the gap you have to pay attention. I'm not saying that you have to deal with uncompetitive women; I'm not saying that you have to deal with women who are not ready to take the chance; I'm not saying that we have to bring women who are not as talented as men to do the job, because then we would all lose. What I'm saying is that we have many women that are talented, we have many women that are there who haven't had a chance, because – sometimes because they're not in the right place at the right moment, or they don't have someone who is pushing for them, leverage. And in the case of the male culture of sharing information and sharing even a drink at the end of the day, telling each other what's empty, what new position is going to be created, and so on and so forth, that doesn't exist in the case of women. And maybe we ought to

propitiate a thing like that. The problem is that, most of all, most of us women have something else to do besides our jobs. We don't go to the bar around the corner. We have to go home, we have to cook, we have to take care of the children. So, it's not that I'm complaining, but I'm telling you that the channels of access to information are not always the same. So what we need is a special programme for women to discover women, to have rosters of women, to put women into a position where they will be handed the job because they're good at it, and they will do it fine. And, you know, if men have decided to have these informal ways of getting in contact and exchanging information, fine, but we have to supplement what does not exist for women, because talent we don't have to supplement – women's talent is a fact; female talent is a fact.

LITTLEJOHNS: Well said. This is World Chronicle. Our guest is Rosario Green, Senior Adviser to the United Nations Secretary-General on Special Political and Gender Issues. Barbara Crossette.

CROSSETTE: It's interesting to follow from that about networking, because in many professions women find that the club atmosphere prevails even outside the club. One stops in and asks a male colleague to go for a drink or something, and the women were often excluded, and sometimes not even intentionally – it's just sort of the way things are. And many people say, well, we have to just get a generation out of the way and we'll be better off. In that light, though, I'm wondering about networks at a grassroots level. Now, it seems in the last major conferences the UN has held that a pattern is emerging, that the conferences are becoming less official and more sort of people – more democratic. And I guess in the case of the women's conferences you would know the difference between the Mexico City conference and the most recent one. There, perhaps, do you think maybe some valuable networks are being built by women from country to country, across borders, and not necessarily in professional levels, even at the grassroots level, that are going to have an effect on the next generation of women's access to power?

GREEN: Oh, yes, you're very, very right in thinking like that. You know, I was involved in '75 in the conference in Mexico, and I was of course Government because I was working for my Government at that time. But there was a parallel forum* not very far away, but in Mexico City everything is far away because of traffic. I was happily involved in the parallel forum as well. We called it like that, you know. And there were many people at that time, you know, there were the Betty Friedans of the time. They were very active. But the movement was too recent, and the movement at the parallel forum was considered to be a bit too revolutionary for the tastes of the Governments.

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* International Tribune for Women.

LITTLEJOHNS: A little shrill, perhaps.

GREEN: That's correct. And, you know, when you look back, 20 years ago, the things they were saying, the things they were doing, you know, their signs of showing their position in favour of women were considered to be against men. And 20 years from that time to now has shown that the revolutionary things of that moment are not revolutionary things now, they're just part of daily life. And this is very interesting, because it means that definitely there was a momentum that was created at that time that has been in crescendo, and that women have always been connected at that level. And the fact that you had so many in China for this last Conference on Women, they multiplied their numbers by I don't know how many times, and the fact that you notice that they sort of knew about each other – they didn't know each other directly, they knew about each other, they knew what groups they represented – tells you of a parallel dialogue which is very important. But I believe that the most important aspect of Beijing was the fact that, more and more, you saw Governments going to the [NGO] Forum, getting close to the women's organizations and asking them, what would you like to happen in Beijing? And many of the positions that were discussed at the Forum were then brought by some of the most advanced Governments that visited the Forum and were included in the final documents.

MENON: But, you know, when you mention the success stories of the women's movement, this is not reflected in UN documentation. If you look at the documents that went to Beijing and, for instance, to the Commission on the Status of Women, they are invariably negative. And they focus on the negative. In introducing and opening the meeting you mentioned the positive developments that have taken place, but if you look at the written record that the UN puts forward before these conferences, this positive element that you mention is missing.

GREEN: I don't think so. I really don't think so. I believe that the 12 points that emerged out of Beijing are the 12 points that are important and reflect a lot of progress. I mean, we're talking about women in situations of armed conflicts; we're talking about violence against women; we're talking about the feminization of poverty – things that before were never accepted, the fact that poverty has unfortunately a female face. If you take the whole amount of people who try to make it with a dollar a day, you will see that almost 70 per cent of those are women, and that is shown –

MENON: No, that's – you've misunderstood me.

GREEN: – in the documentation produced by the UN.

MENON: No, I – you misunderstood what I said. You said that – to put it very crudely, "You've come a long way, baby", which is the commercial way of putting that women's status has improved enormously. That fact is not reflected in UN documentation.

For instance, to give some kind of perspective, to give it the focus that Barbara did, she said that women very often were excluded from being asked for a drink. Now, the propaganda of the women's movement makes it very difficult for a man to stop and ask a woman for a drink and not be misunderstood. If a boss stops in and asks a person who's working for him, a woman, for a drink, how would that be interpreted?

CROSSETTE: That's a whole other issue.

MENON: Yes, it is.

CROSSETTE: And there's a question of how that's handled, which gets to the question of sexual harassment inside the Organization. It's very tricky.

MENON: Right. So, you see, what I'm saying is if you come very strongly on a negative note saying that nothing has improved and saying that almost anything that a man does is wrong, in a bureaucracy, then you basically are making cultural change, which is necessary in this context, much more difficult.

GREEN: But I don't believe that we put ourselves in the extreme situations. You know, if a colleague asks me for a drink to keep on discussing issues or to go with a bunch of other people just, you know, to gossip a little bit and to relax after a long day of work, it depends on the way he asks me. I mean, we're not silly. We're not all the time expecting to be harassed by someone else. I mean, we develop a very good working relationship and we're able to translate that working relationship outside the place of work. So I don't believe that everything is so black and white as you are presenting.

MENON: No, that's precisely my point. No, I'm not saying it's black and white, I'm saying it's gray.

LITTLEJOHNS: Ambassador Green, here in the United Nations are you regarded by your male colleagues or by the male staff at lower levels in the Secretariat as a threat? I mean, how – if you're going to have more jobs for women, there are going to be fewer jobs for men. And a lot of men, of course, have invested many years of their careers in the United Nations, and presumably they are not exactly encouraging the movement toward more jobs for women. How do you deal with that?

GREEN: Well, you know, whatever statistics you look at, you will see that men are much more numerous in the United Nations than women. Our targets are not even 50 per cent right now, our targets are 35 per cent, and eventually, in the year 2000 – and that was what the Secretary-General promised – 50 and 50, all levels.

LITTLEJOHNS: But the Department of Public Information is, I believe, the only department in the Secretariat that has 50-50.

GREEN: I understand that also the Department of Administration and Management has reached that goal as well.

LITTLEJOHNS: Oh, is that so?

GREEN: Which is very good because, you know, one is the administration, including human resources, and the other one is our public face, because it is the information that goes around about the United Nations. But it is very important that we achieve that in the other departments as well. The economic and social departments are always working on those issues because they incorporated the issue of women before it was reflected in many of our most recent documents. But in the political departments – I mean Peace-keeping Operations or the Department of Political Affairs, and so on and so forth – an effort has to be made in order to really be able to reach the goal set forward. And not only that but, in the field in particular, something else has to be done, because the presence of women in our missions is not as important as we'd like it to be. And what I was saying a moment ago is that we women have a way of getting into the community where we are working which is a different way than the way men do it. We are very willing to sit with the community, to think with the community, to pray with the community, to participate in communal activities. That's a very female –

MENON: It is. In fact, women are much better networked than men are. And it's been my experience that men are much more competitive with each other, and women are much more cooperative and networked.

CROSSETTE: And women are getting I think also very, very practical. You talked about theory and revolution and things. But I thought leading up to Beijing the things that women were asking for from the poorest parts of the world were pretty concrete – the right to inheritance, the right to education for their children.

GREEN: That's right.

CROSSETTE: They weren't talking airy-fairy theory, they were talking specific goals.

GREEN: That's why I want to go back to these 12 points that really were recognized as the critical areas. And all of them are very pragmatic. What about stereotypes, for instance?

MENON: Well, I was just about to raise that, about the media. Which – I think the UN seems to think that women are not well represented in the media, and I really would question this. You take any media situation, any newsroom, and including most developing countries, and you would find a much greater number of women working as reporters, as editors, than in almost any other field.

LITTLEJOHNS: Well, I'm afraid the man has to have the last word.

GREEN: Is that so?

[LAUGHTER]

LITTLEJOHNS: That's all the time we have.

GREEN: That's quite unfortunate. I wanted to ask him how does he explain the stereotype in media about women.

LITTLEJOHNS: Thank you for being with us on this edition of **World Chronicle**. Our guest has been Rosario Green, Senior Adviser to the United Nations Secretary-General on Special Political and Gender Issues. She was interviewed by Bhaskar Menon of the *International Documents Review* and Barbara Crossette of *The New York Times*.

I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of **World Chronicle**.

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